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ABSTRACT

An investigation concerned with teacher styles and strategies for coping with problem students suggests that role definition may not be as important a teacher variable as originally postulated. Thirty-seven experienced elementary school teachers were observed to determine overall management skill level and actual response to problem behavior. Teachers were divided into two role orientations: one group stressed the instructional role and the other the socializational role. Following observation, teachers responded to a series of written vignettes depicting 12 types of problem student behavior. While both teacher role emphasis and ability did affect teacher responses, the most powerful factor was the type of student behavior depicted. The research suggests that socialization problems (disobedience or disruption) provoke more intense and less effective teacher responses than do instructional problems. (Author/LH)

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INFLUENCE OF TEACHER ROLE DEFINITION ON STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH PROBLEM STUDENTS

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Influence of Teacher Role Definition on Strategies for Coping with Problem Students[1]

Mary M. Rohrkemper and Jere E. Brophy[2]

As Good and Brophy (1977) point out, there are two basic teacher roles: instructor and socializer. They believe that teachers' role definitions affect their classroom behavior, and recommend that future teachers make decisions about grade level and teaching milieu which reflect the balance of role functions they prefer.

Related ideas about the interrelations of role definition, perception, opinion, attitude, and ultimate behavior have been expressed by various role theorists. Typically, role theory assumes that role definitions regularize perceptions and responses, especially in ambiguous situations. The notion that person perceptions influence *behavior* (as opposed to attitudes and impressions) toward persons within the situation is important and has face validity, but has not yet been systematically researched (Messé, Stollak, & Michaels, Note 1). Our study examines these assumptions within the context of teaching.

Data Source

This study is part of a larger investigation concerned with teacher styles and strategies for coping with problem students. The data to be presented concern the effect of teacher role definition (as described on

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[1]This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, 1979.

[2]Mary M. Rohrkemper is a research intern with and project manager of IRT's Classroom Strategy Study. Jere E. Brophy is coordinator of that project and a professor of teacher education and educational psychology.

a self-report instrument) and teacher management ability (as rated by the teacher's principal and a classroom observer) on teacher perception of and response to student problem behavior as depicted in a series of written vignettes. Data were obtained from elementary teachers in Lansing who had at least 3 years' experience at their current grade levels, and who were recommended by their principals as either average or outstanding in dealing with problem students.

Method

As part of the larger study, all teachers were initially observed for two half days by research assistants unaware of the principals' nominations. Observers rated them on general management skills and noted their attitude and response to students who fit the project's 12 problem-type descriptions.[3] These observation data provide a check on the teachers' self-reports of what they would say and do in the problem situations depicted in the vignettes. Observers' ratings of the teachers were compared with principals' ratings, yielding three ability groups: an agreed-upon high ability group, an agreed-upon average group, and a mixed group that received mildly contrasting ratings from the principal vs. the observer. (Teachers who provoked strongly contrasting ratings were excluded.) This yielded a sample of 37 teachers, 19 who emphasized instruction (7 high ability, 6 mixed, and 6 average), and 18 who emphasized socialization (4 high ability, 8 mixed, and 6 average).

Following the classroom observations, the teachers responded to 12

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[3]The problem types identified for this study can be divided into subsets that typify *socialization* difficulties (hostile aggressive, passive aggressive, defiant, rejected by peers, immature); *instruction* difficulties (failure syndrome, perfectionist, underachiever, low achiever, short attention span); or *both* (hyperactive, shy/withdrawn).

written vignettes (half of a series of 24) depicting each of the 12 types of student problem behaviors that would require some kind of teacher response (Appendix A).

Teachers' accounts of what they would say and do if the situation occurred in their classroom were analyzed by four variables: (A) teacher perceives the vignette as a gestalt versus a series of discrete student behaviors; (B) presence of instructional (high or minimal) versus imperative content in influence messages; (C) teacher's handling of problem as organized and sequential (proactive) versus momentary and fragmented (reactive); and (D) the goal of the influence attempt involves attempts at long-run solution (mental hygiene/coping techniques; rewards/shaping) versus short-run solution (control/threat or punishment) or avoidance (Appendix B).

After stating what they would say and do (reporting their *behavior*), the teachers were asked to describe the student depicted in the vignette as they would if they were helping a student teacher to understand that student (reporting their *perceptions*). These teacher descriptions were coded for accuracy (Variable D) and internal consistency (Variable E). (See coding instrument, Appendix B.)

Finally, the teachers were asked to indicate their preferred degree of emphasis on socialization versus instruction on a 4-level Role Definition Scale (Appendix C) to allow comparison of teachers who defined their primary role as socializer with those who defined it as instructor. Levels one and two were combined to form the instruction emphasis group, and levels three and four were combined to form the socialization emphasis group.

Coder Agreement

Overall, inter-coder agreement was high. Agreement within one point was over 80% for all scales, with the lowest percent exact agreement being 67% for Variable D and the highest percent exact agreement being 96% for Variable A.

Data Analysis

The dependent measures are categorical, so each category within each of the six coding variables shown in Appendix B was treated as a 0,1 possibility, analyzed separately, and treated as a repeated measure.

Data were aggregated by the three vignette types: instruction problems (five vignettes), socialization problems (five vignettes), or both (two vignettes). Because these frequencies were uneven, scores were transformed into proportions by applying constant transformations of .2, .2, and .5 respectively to the observed frequencies.

Results

Results, which are summarized in the table, indicate that vignette type was much more powerful than teacher ability level or role definition in affecting teacher perceptions and reported behaviors. Teacher perceptions and cognitions concerning the student behavior depicted in the vignettes are revealed by Variables A, E, and G (response congruence).[4] Teachers perceived most vignettes wholistically (Variable A) as representing chronic behavior patterns, although this was more notable for the mixed vignettes than the socialization or instruction vignettes (proportions were .83, .58, and .51 respectively). Overall, the vignettes were generally understood accurately by teachers (Variable E), although with differences in degree of precision. The inaccuracies that did occur tended to be in

[4] Variable F collapsed into Variable E and was eliminated.

vignettes depicting instructional settings, which presented more ambiguous problem behaviors.

Response congruence (Variable G) was the only category of "cognitive" variables to reveal effects of ability and role: The more able teachers gave more integrated responses. Overall, responses containing clear contradictions were infrequent, and vignettes depicting hyperactivity or passive withdrawal apparently were the easiest for teachers to comprehend.

Teacher behavior (reported influence attempts) was coded under Variable B, instructive versus imperative content of the influence message; Variable C, proactive versus reactive nature of the influence attempt; and Variable D, goal of the influence attempt.

In general, teacher response varied as a function of vignette type. Instruction vignettes (Level 1) typically produced highly instructive responses, especially if teachers described themselves as having a socialization emphasis or were in the high management ability group. Responses to the instruction vignettes were typically proactive and likely to involve mental health/coping techniques (although rewards/shaping and control/threat goals were well represented).

Responses to the socialization vignettes (Level 2) indicated a quite different pattern. First, there were nearly as many imperative responses as highly instructive responses and, in general, responses to these vignettes were more varied. The socialization vignettes also received the most reactive responses, although proactive responses were still the most typical. Finally, in sharp contrast to the instruction vignettes, mental hygiene/coping skills were mentioned least frequently as goals in the socialization situations, and rewards/shaping were almost non-existent. In place of those long-term goals, teachers stressed short-run control-desist attempts in responding to socialization problems. Apparently,

the differential strategies proposed for responding to the problems presented in the instruction versus socialization vignettes were due to the specific behavior problems involved, rather than to the degree of ambiguity or required inference (which seemed to affect the cognitive measures). Socialization problems seem more likely than instruction problems to reveal the effects of role and ability factors. A closer analysis of the individual vignettes, including examination of problem-ownership (Gordon, 1974; Stollak, 1973) and controllability of the behavior (Weiner, Note 2) should provide more information as to what is responsible for these differential response patterns.

The third vignette level, concerned with both socialization and instruction, appears to be conceptually quite different from the instruction and socialization vignettes. These vignettes very frequently produced non-direct influence messages (ignoring or distracting the student). Teachers responded to them proactively and typically stressed long-term goals. Given the behaviors depicted in these vignettes (hyperactivity and shy/withdrawn), such responses are sensible.

Discussion

Teachers' scores on the measures of (1) perceiving the vignette as a gestalt versus as discrete behaviors; (2) instructive versus imperative content; (3) proactive versus reactive response; (4) goal of influence attempt; (5) accuracy of perception; and (6) congruence of perception and response varied most clearly according to type of vignette. Management ability level and role emphasis had lesser effects. The only main effect obtained for role definition was in relation to the instructive content of influence messages. Teachers self-described as emphasizing socialization gave more highly instructive messages than teachers who said they emphasized instruction. The only main effect obtained for ability

level was on the measure of the congruence of teacher perception and response. Highly integrated responses were most frequent in the high ability group and least evident in the average ability group.

Role definition may not be as important a teacher variable as originally postulated. While both role emphasis and ability did affect teachers' responses, the most powerful factor was the type of student behavior depicted. More knowledge is needed about types of student problem behaviors and their effects on teachers. Our study indicates that socialization problems (disobedience or disruption) provoke more intense and less effective teacher responses than instruction problems (failure to respond to, or handle, academic tasks). Problem ownership and controllability are two additional variables suggested for investigation.

Reference Notes

1. Messe, L.A., Stollak, G.E., & Michaels, G.Y. Sensitivity to children's behavior and adult-child playroom interactions. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, 1977.

2. Weiner, B. Personal communication, February 27, 1979.

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Gordon, T. T.E.T. Teacher effectiveness training. New York: David McKay, 1974.

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APPENDIX A: VIGNETTE INSTRUMENT 1-12

* 1. Joe could be a capable student, but his self concept is so poor that he actually describes himself as stupid. He makes no serious effort to learn, shrugging off responsibility by saying that "that stuff" is too hard for him. Right now he is dawdling instead of getting started on an assignment that you know he can do. You know that if you approach him he will begin to complain that the assignment is too hard and that he can't do it.

** 2. This morning, several students excitedly tell you that on the way to school they saw Tom beating up Sam and taking his lunch money. Tom is the class bully and has done things like this many times.

*** 3. Bill is an extremely active child. He seems to burst with energy, and today he is barely "keeping the lid on." This morning, the class is working on their art projects and Bill has been in and out of his seat frequently. Suddenly, Roger lets out a yell and you look up to see that Bill has knocked Roger's sculpture off his desk. Bill says he didn't mean to do it, he was just returning to his seat.

** 4. Mark is not well accepted by his classmates. Today he has been trying to get some of the other boys to play a particular game with him. After much pleading the boys decide to play the game, but exclude Mark. Mark argues, saying that he should get to play because it was his idea in the first place, but the boys start without him. Finally, Mark gives up and slinks off, rejected again.

* 5. Beth has average ability for school work, but she is so anxious about the quality of her work that she seldom finishes an assignment because of all her "start-overs." This morning you have asked the children to make pictures to decorate the room. The time allocated to art has almost run out and Beth is far from finished with her picture. You ask her about it and find out she has "made mistakes" on the other ones and this is her third attempt at a "good picture."

** 6. The class is about to begin a test. The room is quiet. Just as you are about to begin speaking, Audrey opens her desk. Her notebook slides off the desk, spilling loose papers on the floor. Audrey begins gathering up the papers, slowly and deliberately. All eyes are upon her. Audrey stops, grins, and then slowly resumes gathering papers. Someone laughs. Others start talking.

* 7. George's attention wanders easily. Today it has been divided between the discussion and various distractions. You ask him a question, but he is distracted and doesn't hear you.

*** 8. Linda is bright enough, but she is shy and withdrawn. She doesn't volunteer to participate in class, and when you call on her directly, she often does not respond. When she does, she usually whispers. Today, you are checking seatwork progress. When you question her, Linda keeps her eyes lowered and says nothing.

* 9. Carl can do good work, but he seldom does. He will try to get out of work. When you speak to him about this, he makes a show of looking serious and pledging reform, but his behavior doesn't change. Just now, you see a typical scene: Carl is making paper airplanes when he is supposed to be working.

** 10. Roger has been fooling around instead of working on his seatwork for several days now. Finally, you tell him that he has to finish or stay in during recess and work on it then. He says, "I won't stay in!" and spends the rest of the period sulking. As the class begins to line up for recess, he quickly jumps up and heads for the door. You tell him that he has to stay inside and finish his assignment, but he just says "No, I don't!" and continues out the door to recess.

** 11. Betty seems younger than the other students in your class. She has difficulty getting along with them and is quick to tattle. She has just told you that she heard some of the boys use "bad words" during recess today.

* 12. Jeff tries hard but is the lowest achiever in the class. This week you taught an important sequence of lessons. You spent a lot of extra time with Jeff and thought he understood the material. Today you are reviewing. All the other students answer your questions with ease, but when you call on Jeff he is obviously lost.

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* Instruction problem: failure syndrome (1), perfectionist (5), short attention span (7), underachiever (9), low achiever (12).

** Socialization problem: hostile aggressive (2), rejected by peers (4), passive aggressive (6), defiant (10), immature (11).

*** Combined instruction and socialization problem (both): hyperactive (3), shy/withdrawn (8).

APPENDIX B: CODING INSTRUMENT

Instructions: Read the entire teacher response to the vignette, prior to any interviewer probing that you feel leads the teacher down a path s/he would not have traveled alone. For example, if you don't feel the teacher would have discussed follow-up strategies without the interviewer's question about it ("Would you do anything else later?"), disregard the follow-up information. Use the overall completeness/richness of the response prior to the probe, and the teacher's typical response pattern (if any) in other vignettes, to guide your judgment. If you are unable to decide, code the entire response. Separately list any unusual responses so we can take a second look at them.

I. Coding for teachers' accounts of their words and actions.

A. Vignette as gestalt vs. discrete behaviors. Does the teacher view the depicted behavior wholistically, recognizing specific incidents as parts of a pattern, or are these incidents seen as discrete elements that do not combine to indicate anything? Note: T does not have to perceive the behavior pattern correctly to be scored 1 - s/he only needs to see it as wholistic/chronic. See E for correctness measure. (Examples from failure syndrome)

1. Yes, the behavior is understood as an instance of a chronic behavior pattern.
   "I see you are worried about your work and don't want to start."
2. No, the vignette is perceived as discrete or isolated behaviors.
   "I see you are dawdling. I know you can do it, you won't get out of it by saying you can't."
3. Can't rate/other

B_1. Instructive vs. imperative content of message. (Vignettes 1-11, 13-23). Does the teacher's response include reasons why the expressed behavior is inappropriate or change is expected, or does the teacher simply demand/command the student? Do the teacher's attempts to influence/change the student include rationales?

This category also applies to commands for reparation and to do's and don'ts in the future. For vignette #2, use this category only to code what the teacher says to Tom. For vignettes #4 and 16, code this category for the teacher's response to the other children, not Mark and Kathy. (Examples from immature (tattling) vignette).

1. Highly Instructive. Teacher provides full, detailed rationale/ information for expectations/actions regarding the student's behavior. (Includes T being an integral part of solving problem)

   "Were the boys doing or saying anything to you to make you feel bad or to hurt you? If not, I really don't want you to come and tell me about their behavior. Other children don't like to be tattled on any more than you do. So unless you or someone else is being hurt, I'd rather you didn't tell me about it."

   For vignettes # 1 and 13, code B_1 for teachers who help the student get started, working through problems with him.
2. Minimally Instructive. Teacher provides limited rationale/ information for expectations/actions regarding the student's behavior. The message is not as complete as those scored 1, but is not confined to commands, as those scored 3. That is, responses scored 2 are essentially "padded" commands. Include rules, if phrased as rules.

   "You don't bother me about that. You only need to worry about yourself - unless someone is getting hurt or it's an emergency."
3. Imperative. Teacher makes demands without giving explanations.

   "Don't tell me that stuff."

   "Play on another part of the playground."
4. Can't rate/other. Teacher response does not include instructions or imperatives or teacher doesn't say enough. The teacher may ignore or distract the student. Code here for teacher instructions for discussion or problem solving, contracts, and other positive approaches. Code modeling w/out explanation or comment here. i.e., "I'd play with Mark so the others would see..."

   "I wouldn't answer her."

   "I'd just ignore it."

   "Tell me about the game you were playing."

   "I'd tell them they must solve the problem and then I'd help them get started."

B_2. Instructive vs. imperative content of teacher's message in instructional situations (vignettes 12 and 24).

1. Highly Instructive. Teacher provides full, detailed instruction/help in a positive and supportive way, or sends the student to a tutor who presumably will do the same.
2. Minimally instructive. Teacher provides limited help in a stop-gap way, provides a specific answer without concern for understanding of necessary concepts, etc. Teacher irritation or disappointment may be present.
3. Imperative. Berates/scolds. Tells student to pay attention or do it right. Acts as if problem is willingness to try rather than low ability.
4. Teacher does not directly help student or provide for assistance. May ignore, distract, or change the assignment. Included here are contracts and other positive approaches.

C. Proactive vs. Reactive Response. Is the teacher's approach thought out - sequential and organized (proactive), or does it seem to be momentary and fragmented without evidence of planning or foresight (reactive)? Distinguish between problems the teacher has thought about and developed a planned response for, from those for which the teacher does not seem to have developed strategies. These latter responses seem to be one-shot, on-the-spot reactions. (Examples from perfectionist vignette)

1. Proactive. Organized and sequential approach: the immediate response is imbedded in a broader, programmatic response. Code here for teachers who "have the routine down." (This does not necessarily mean that that routine is effective, only that the teacher takes control and changes/structures the situation.) Includes preventive approach.
   "Beth, do as much as you can now and then use your free time to finish." Then later I'd talk privately with Beth about this. I'd also point out whenever I make a mistake or didn't do something perfect..."
2. Reactive. Teacher response is brief and indicates a momentary, fragmented reaction that is not part of a larger, or preventive, approach. The teacher is "stimulus bound," reacting to the situation rather than operating to change it. Includes citing rules if it stops at that.
   "Then turn it in unfinished."
   "That's wasting paper. What is our rule about paper?"
3. Teacher avoids the situation. Uses distracting or ignoring, not for the purpose of extinguishing the behavior, but for avoiding dealing with the situation. It seems as if the teacher doesn't know what to do, but does not try to get more information.
   "I wouldn't bother with it."
   "I would say, 'I like the colors you have used.' and not mention that it's not done."
4. Other.

D. Goal of the influence attempt. What is the goal of the teacher's response to the student? Just to stop the behavior in the present? To control its expression in the future? To replace it with more appropriate behavior? This category is used both where a change in student motivation or behavior is needed and where teacher help is needed. Multiple code if more than one alternative applies. (Examples from underachiever vignette)

1. Mental hygiene/coping techniques. The goal is replacement of inappropriate behavior with desirable behavior, via a "cure" or change in what the teacher perceives to be the cause of the behavior. i.e., meeting student needs. (Example from underachiever vignette)
   "Then I would give him a more active role in the classroom to help him learn to like and value school."
   Also coded 1 are responses that involve building the student's

skills for coping with problems. Those coping strategies are general, extending beyond the immediate situation. (Example from short attention span vignette)

"George, you know what I think about listening... Then I'd work on listening skills with him..."

2. Rewards/shaping. The goal involves <u>immediate</u> (and future) replacement of inappropriate behavior with desirable behavior via praise, rewards, or contract systems. This category includes teachers shaping successive approximations. Score all ILTW's here. ("I like the way...").

"I'd tell him to put the airplane away. Then I'd set up a contract with him: if he finished and corrected all his work by the end of each week, he could spend time making airplanes."

"I wouldn't say anything to him, but loud enough so he could hear, I'd say 'I like the way most of you are busy working."

"Every day I'd stand a little further from her and say, 'Linda, a little louder..., and praise her when she did speak up. Eventually I'd be on the other side of the room."

3. Control/threat or punishment. The goal is to control the expression of inappropriate behavior in the immediate situation and/or the future. The teacher's concern is <u>not</u> with the substitution of desirable behavior, but is limited to inhibiting the undesirable behavior, often through threats or punishment. Deliberate ignoring that is based on extinction principles is also coded here.

"I'd tell him if he ever made airplanes again, he'd stay after school and he'd know I meant it."

"I'd tell him to put those away and get busy."

4. Avoidance. The teacher's goal is to avoid dealing with the situation. Uses distracting or ignoring, <u>not</u> for extinguishing the behavior, but for avoiding dealing with the situation.

"I wouldn't bother with him."

"Look everyone, Carl made an airplane."

5. Can't rate/other.

II. Coding for Teacher's Description of Student.

How does the teacher perceive/understand the student described in the vignette?

E. Accuracy of Perception. Does the teacher describe the student as the vignette intended, or has the teacher "misread" the behavior? SEE APPENDED LIST.* (Examples from failure syndrome vignette)

1. Accurate and precise.
   "This student is afraid he will fail"
2. Generally accurate, but imprecise.
   "This student isn't comfortable with school work."

* Not included in this AERA handout.

3. Inaccurate.
   "This student is lazy"
4. Teacher parrots vignette, does not describe in own words.
   "Joe could be a capable student, but his self-concept is poor."
5. Can't rate.

III. Congruence of teacher perception and response.

Compare the teacher's words to and actions with the student with his/her description of the student and rationale. Do the three segments complement one another and form an integrated response? Would you predict the teacher's response given the description? rationale? Note that responses which are internally consistent will rate high on this scale regardless of their richness, credibility, or correctness of premise.

G. Consider the following three-point scale:

1	2	3
Integrated whole		conflicting elements

(Examples from failure syndrome vignette)

1. Three segments are compatible, form an integrated response.
   "I'd help him with the first few problems...because he needs help getting started...this student is afraid to do his work, afraid he'll fail."
2. Three segments are not completely integrated, but there are no conflicts. One or more elements is different from, but not contradictory to, the others.
   "I'd go over the directions with him to be sure he understood...he has a poor self concept...this student needs to be motivated, encouraged to work on his own.
3. One or more antithetical to the others. Use this rating to flag any clear contradiction or conflict, where elements are at crossed purposes.
   "I'd tell him to take a time out...he needs to listen... this student doesn't understand the lesson, he doesn't know how to do it."
4. Can't rate/other.

APPENDIX C: TEACHER ROLE DEFINITION FORM

Subject No. _____

_____

Teachers differ in their relative emphasis on instruction vs. child socialization (i.e., development of positive self-concept, interaction skills with adults and peers . . .). Some teachers believe that their primary goal is instructing students in the curriculum. Other teachers see subject matter instruction as secondary to the fostering of positive, insightful self-growth of students. How would you characterize your relative emphasis on instruction vs. socialization in your teaching?

CHECK ONE:

_____ Much heavier emphasis on instruction vs. socialization.

_____ Somewhat more emphasis on instruction vs. socialization.

_____ Somewhat more emphasis on socialization vs. instruction.

_____ Much heavier emphasis on socialization vs. instruction.

Table: Summary of Significant Results of Analysis of Variance

Variables	Vignette Main Effects				Other Main Effects			Interaction Effects
	Instruction	Mixed	Socialization					
	Vignettes*	Vignettes*	Vignettes*	P Values				
					Role Main Effect:			
					Instruction	Socialization		
A. Gestalt vs. Discrete Behavior								
A.1. Chronic Behavior Pattern	.96	.98	.87	.06	Emphasis*	Emphasis*	P Values	P Values
B. Instructive vs. Imperative Content								
B.1. Highly Instructive	.50	.31	.35	ns	.34	.44	.06	Ability x Vignette (.05)
B.2. Minimally Instructive	.33	.29	.18	.01				
B.3. Imperative	.15	.09	.30	.0001				
B.4. Ignore, Distract, or Other.	.13	.40	.28	.0001				
C. Proactive vs. Reactive Response								
C.1. Proactive	.91	.96	.88	ns				
D. Goal of Influence Attempt								
D.1. Mental Hygiene/Coping	.50	.49	.38	.06				Role x Ability (.04)
D.2. Reward/Shaping	.35	.39	.05	.0001				
D.3. Control/Threat or Punishment	.40	.45	.73	.0001				
D.4. Avoidance	.03	.00	.02	.05				3-Way Interaction (.05)
E. Accuracy of Perception					Ability Main Effect:			
E.1. Accurate and Precise	.51	.83	.58	.0001				
E.2. Accurate but Imprecise	.35	.14	.34	.001				
E.3. Inaccurate	.10	.03	.05	.02				
					High	Mixed	Average	P Values
G. Congruence of Perception and Response								
G.1. Integrated	.71	.64	.64	ns	.80	.64	.55	.02
G.2. Compatible but not Integrated	.20	.33	.21	.05	.18	.21	.35	.06
G.3. Conflicted	.10	.03	.13	.004				Role x Ability (.08)

*Values are mean transformed proportions.

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